

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6204

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK(NI)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: SECRETARY REES ANNOUNCES PRISON REFORMS

1. ADDRESSING HOUSE OF COMMONS ON AMENDMENT TO NI EMERGENCY PROVISIONS ACT WHICH ADDS ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE (UVF), A PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATION, TO LIST OF PROSCRIBED ORGANIZATIONS, NI SECRETARY REES ANNOUNCED GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR PRISON REFORMS. HE ALSO STRESSED FACT THAT GOVERNMENT HAD NO INTENTION OF DECLARING AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS IN FUTURE. ASSERTING THAT THOSE WHO LABORED UNDER THIS MISAPPREHENSION WILL BE BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED. AMENDMENT WAS APPROVED OVERWHELMINGLY.

2. ON PRISON REFORM, REES SAID GOVERNMENT WILL PHASE OUT "SPECIAL CATEGORY" STATUS FOR THOSE CONVICTED OF POLITICAL CRIMES, BEGINNING MARCH 1, 1975 (SUCH CONVICTS ARE NOW HELD IN BARRACKS COMPOUNDS RATHER THAN CELL BLOCKS AND ENJOY PRIVILEGES DENIED COMMON PRISONERS). ALL PERSONS CONVICTED AFTER THAT DATE WILL BE HELD IN REGULAR PRISONS WITHOUT SPECIAL PRIVILEGES. AS NI PRISON SYSTEM IS HEAVILY OVERCROWDED AND HAS NO PAROLE SYSTEM, GOVERNMENT WILL BEGIN RELEASING THOSE (OTHER THAN LIFE PRISONERS) WHO HAVE SERVED HALF THEIR SENTENCES,

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THUS FREEING SPACE FOR NEW CONVICTS (GOVERNMENT IS ALSO

PROCEEDING WITH PRISON CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM). PRISONERS RELEASED EARLY WOULD HAVE TO SERVE BALANCE OF ORIGINAL SENTENCE IF SUBSEQUENTLY CONVICTED OF ANOTHER CRIME.

3. CONCERNING DETENTION, REES REAFFIRMED HIS OBJECTIVE OF ENDING THIS PRACTICE AND GOVERNMENT'S LONGER TERM AIM OF "PLANNED, ORDERLY AND PROGRESSIVE REDUCTION" OF ARMY UNITS IN NI AS SECURITY SITUATION NORMALIZES.

4. COMMENT: ENTIRE PROGRAM ANNOUNCED BY REES MUST BE VIEWED AS PROVIDING FURTHER INCENTIVE FOR PEACE IN NI AS WELL AS DISINCENTIVES FOR MEN OF VIOLENCE. PRISON REFORMS, WHICH WERE WELL RECEIVED BY COMMONS, GO A LONG WAY TOWARD IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS OF GARDINER COMMISSION REPORT. INITIAL REACTION FROM PROTESTANT LEADERS WAS FAVORABLE. UUUC PARLIAMENTARY LEADER JAMES MOLYNEAUX SUGGESTED REES HAD GONE LONG WAY TOWARD MEETING REQUESTS OF PROTESTANTS AND ENDORSED TERMINATION OF SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS AND REMISSION PLAN. JOHN HUME (SDLP DEPUTY LEADER), HOWEVER, TOLD BELFAST PRINCIPAL OFFICER (BOTH WERE AT PARLIAMENT) THAT REES' REMISSION PROGRAM AMOUNTED TO "HALF AMNESTY."

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